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FM AMEMBASSY RIYADH  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0929  
INFO RUEHML/AMEMBASSY MANILA PRIORITY 0717  
RUEHZM/GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL COLLECTIVE  
RUEHPH/CDC ATLANTA GA PRIORITY

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 RIYADH 000761

SENSITIVE

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA/ARP (HARRIS)

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [ECON](#) [PGOV](#) [TBIO](#) [KFLU](#) [CASC](#) [ASEC](#) [AMGT](#) [SA](#)

SUBJECT: H1N1: SAUDI HEALTH MINISTRY ACTS EXPEDITIOUSLY IN FIRST  
CASES OF SWINE FLU

Ref: Dhahran 124

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11. (SBU) Key Points and Action Request:

-- The Ministry of Health (MOH) has confirmed two cases of H1N1,  
both involving persons who contracted the disease abroad.

-- MOH will adhere to WHO guidelines and has imposed neither travel  
nor import restrictions.

-- MOH is gearing up for the Hajj/Umra season which it intends to  
tackle by increasing surveillance, rather than restricting the  
movement of pilgrims.

-- Action Request: Post requests guidance on how to respond to MOH's  
request for the USG to provide a breakdown of U.S. H1N1 cases to  
show how many were contracted outside the U.S. See paragraph 10.

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COMMENT  
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12. (SBU) The MOH Deputy Minister's "Let's get to business" attitude  
and succinct briefing are good signs that KSA is taking the outbreak  
seriously and has a plan. During Hajj/Umra, caring for the pilgrims  
becomes the chief concern for all Saudi ministries. Consequently we  
expect that, in light of the H1N1 outbreak, the profile of the MOH  
will rise accordingly.

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QUICK RESPONSE TO TWO IMPORTED CASES OF H1N1  
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13. (SBU) On June 7, EconCouns and Econoff met with Khalid  
Al-Zahrani, the MOH's Assistant Deputy Minister for Preventive  
Medicine, to discuss Saudi Arabia's H1N1 preparedness and planning.

14. (SBU) Zahrani confirmed one case involving a Filipina nurse who  
works at King Faisal Specialist Hospital and Research Center  
(KFSHRC) in Riyadh, who arrived May 29 on a Gulf Air flight from the  
Philippines, via Manama, Bahrain. The nurse first showed flu  
symptoms on June 1 and was tested for H1N1 as part of a routine  
check at the KFSHRC. A second test confirmed the nurse had  
contracted the H1N1 strain on June 3. She and her family members  
have been quarantined. The nurse is in good health and receiving  
medical attention. News of the nurse's infection set off a  
"mini-panic" in the large Filipino expat community, which caused  
dozens to rush to hospitals with flu-like symptoms. MOH is  
methodically checking individuals who were in contact with the nurse  
to identify other potential cases.

15. (SBU) The other case, confirmed by MOH via Consulate Dhahran, involves an H1N1-infected Saudi student returning to Jeddah from Washington (Post subsequently discovered the student travelled on Saudi Arabian Airlines flight 32 via flight 1108 from Jeddah to Dhahran for a visa interview). The student was initially identified as a possible carrier by airport thermal detection equipment in Jeddah, but was still allowed to board another flight to Dammam. The MOH set up a hotline for passengers on both flights to call for testing and published these on the front page of the Kingdom's two English-language dailies, the Arab News and the Saudi Gazette (more in reftel).

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SCREENING CAPACITY TO INCREASE, NO TRAVEL  
RESTRICTIONS  
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16. (SBU) Zahrani said the Riyadh case was a "good drill" for the Ministry and that it was handled smoothly. The MOH has taken precautions, including setting up a hotline for reporting H1N1 cases and issuing travel advisories to Mexico, the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, Germany, Spain and Japan. The MOH aligns its travel advisory policies with WHO guidelines and to date has imposed no new restrictions on passengers or products entering or exiting the Kingdom.

17. (SBU) Saudi Arabia has the capacity for H1N1 testing and quarantine at KFSHRC, and reportedly it and other hospitals have been on high alert throughout the global H1N1 outbreak. King Khalid International Airport in Riyadh, King Abdulaziz International Airport in Jeddah, and King Fahd International Airport in Dammam recently acquired thermal detectors to screen international travelers for fever. During President Obama's June 3 visit to Riyadh, two members of the White House press corps delegation were

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pulled aside upon arrival via a chartered U.S. flight to have their temperatures checked (via thermometer), though neither were found to have fevers. (Note: We understand the Saudis are only using the equipment on flights from areas known to have had H1N1 cases. In any case, implementation has been mixed -- one econoff was screened upon arrival in Riyadh from the United States via Switzerland on May 31. Another two were not screened on a flight from Bahrain May 21 and another was not screened on a flight from Istanbul on May 30.)

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Hajj/Umra  
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18. (SBU) MOH is mobilizing for the Hajj/Umra season, Zahrani said. During this season, the care and welfare of the pilgrims becomes the prime concern of all Saudi ministries. The MOH has clear instructions to increase awareness, screening capacity, and the number of health providers in pilgrimage areas. MOH will work with pilgrim health units to bolster surveillance capabilities and does not intend to restrict the movement of pilgrims.

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Cooperation with the USG  
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19. (SBU) Zahrani said that the MOH has asked the Centers for Disease Control to second an official to the Kingdom. Discussions are underway.

110. (SBU) Zahrani asked for a breakdown of U.S. H1N1 statistics to indicate which cases originated in the U.S., and which originated abroad.

111. (SBU) Zahrani designated Dr. Raafat F. Al-Hakeem as the Embassy's POC for day-to-day H1N1 issues.

112. (U) The Embassy's H1N1 coordinator is Ms. Courtney Gillespie; tel:(966) 1-488-3800 x4140, email: gillespiecc@state.gov.

